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DWCNewsline

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Bulletin No. 28-06

May 11, 2006

California Division of Workers' Compensation and UCLA Center for Health Policy Research study access to medical care

Injured workers and physicians selected for the study are urged to participate

Oakland – The California Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) is urging injured workers and physicians to take part in a scientific study about access to medical care in the workers' compensation system. The study, sponsored by DWC, is being conducted by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. Up to 1,200 injured workers and 1,200 physicians will be randomly sampled for the study. The study will also sample a representative number of workers' compensation insurers, self-insured employers and third party administrators.

"The information we gather will tell us whether workers injured in California have access to quality care," said DWC Executive Medical Director Dr. Anne Searcy. "It's vital that injured workers and physicians selected for the study participate because their responses will help us make decisions on important issues."

A recently enacted California law requires the DWC to contract with an independent consulting firm to perform an annual study of access to medical treatment for injured workers. Researchers began collecting data for this first study under that law from physicians in April, and began surveying injured workers in May. The final report for the first year will be completed in the fall of 2006. The study findings will serve as a baseline for an ongoing effort to monitor and describe trends in access to quality medical care in workers' compensation cases, and will provide necessary information to state regulators engaged in rulemaking.

"Participants in the survey can rest assured that all information provided is completely confidential," said Dr. Gerald Kominski, associate director of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and the principal investigator of the survey. "Responses will be reported in the aggregate only, and reports and publications from the study will not reference specific individuals."

All data collected will be stored in a password-protected database only accessible by authorized study personnel. No one except the center's study staff will know who participated in the study, and participation will not affect any legal rights or services to which participants are entitled.

Center research staff will mail surveys to randomly selected workers injured on the job between April and June of 2005. Researchers will then follow up by phone and interview participants about the medical care they

received for their injury. The 10-minute interview includes questions about doctor visits, ease of getting health care and satisfaction with care, and can be done over the phone, on a secure Web site or by mail.

Selected physicians are being surveyed using the same method as injured workers and are being asked to share their opinions about, and experiences with, providing workers' compensation care in California. The study group includes medical doctors, osteopaths, podiatrists, chiropractors, acupuncturists and psychologists who currently treat workers' compensation patients, or who stopped treating workers' comp patients between 2001 and today.

Questions include the scope of the physician's workers' compensation practice, reasons for any changes in that practice and experiences providing care in the workers' compensation system. Participants are also being asked to suggest ways to encourage providers to continue to treat work-related injuries and illnesses.

Insurers will provide information on their experiences contracting with physicians, standards for access to medical care for injured workers and observations of injured workers' ability to access medical care.

Injured workers and physicians can find more information on the study on the DWC's Web site at www.dir.ca.gov/dwc.

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